

Air-Space Museum Approval Sought

By Abbott Combes

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"You can see how Mr. Collins got to the moon all right."

"He may find it easier to get to the moon than to get the museum approved."

It was in this atmosphere that Michael Collins, former Apollo 11 astronaut and former assistant secretary of State for public affairs, appeared before the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) yesterday seeking approval of the latest idea for a National Air and Space Museum on the Mall between 4th and 7th Streets SW.

Collins is director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum, which chiefly consists of several prefabricated tin structures on Independence Avenue.

NCPC approval was given

the concept, but not until after a 90-minute architectural debate, over the proposed design for the new \$40 million structure.

The gist of the argument was whether the museum, designed by St. Louis architect Gyo Obata to be constructed with precast concrete, marble or granite aggregate and glass, was in keeping with the monumental nature of the Mall.

NCPC member Paul Thiry, a Seattle architect, voted against it. Describing it as an "industrial-type" building from the "elevator-air conditioner school of architecture," he criticized it for lacking "the classic proportions you'd expect to have in a building across from the National Gallery."

On the other side, NCPC member Edmund W. Dreyfuss, also an architect, praised Obata's conception, "I wish I had

done it—it's very good," he said.

Collins, politely disagreeing with Thiry, argued that the museum would possess "a flavor of air and space."

The NCPC stipulated that the building's roof remain clear of mechanical equipment and that consideration of the structure's materials be expanded to include possible use of marble and granite.

Congress has authorized construction of a \$40 million

air and space museum, but has never appropriated the funds.

Collins said the Smithsonian hoped to obtain the funds in the fiscal 1973 budget.

Yesterday's NCPC approval is the first of three votes it will take on the matter. After the Fine Arts Commission considers the esthetics of the design at a Nov. 17 meeting, the plan must obtain preliminary and final approval from the NCPC.